MISS HELEN ADAMS KELLER'S

FIRST YEAR OF

COLLEGE PREPARATORY WORK

by

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THE first year of college preparatory work done by Miss Helen Adams Keller closed in June, 1897. A brief review of it will be of interest to all who have at heart the mental cultivation of the deaf or the blind. In response to a request from the editor of the *Century* magazine, I prepared for him a statement in brief of the beginning of the year of which I purpose now to present a more complete summary. This was published in January, 1897.

In September, 1896, Miss Keller entered "The Cambridge School" for girls, as a candidate for college preparation. She was accompanied by her teacher, Miss Anne M. Sullivan, the plan being to have both in every class, Miss Sullivan being the interpreter to Helen of the instruction of the respective teachers. For the first time in her life, Helen was to live in the constant society of seeing and hearing persons, and to be taught in classes of normal pupils, by instructors who had no experience in teaching the deaf or the blind. Her companionship, not alone in school-time but in the hours at home, was to be supplied by normal persons. I had, myself, no experience in work with any but the ordinary seeing and hearing pupils, and I was unable to converse with Helen, except so far as I did it by allowing her to talk with her mouth and to be embarrassed by the difficulty of taking my words from my lips with her fingers.

Though Helen had not before been in a course preparatory to college, she had been taught much English, and it was evident that she needed little more instruction in that direction beyond the reading and critical study of the books specially assigned by the colleges for that purpose for the year 1897. She had also made good progress in French, and it was thought that some review, united with

drill in reading French, would suffice to fit her for the examination in that language. Two years previous to her coming to Cambridge, Helen had received instruction in Latin, amounting, as Miss Sullivan estimated, to one-half of a year's drill in this School. This instruction proved to have been of the best quality, but it was felt that the lapse of time must have left the impressions somewhat dim in Miss Keller's mind. German was a subject in which Helen proved uncommonly facile, and we were sure that a good year's work would fit her for both the "elementary" and the "advanced" examinations. All the expectations formed at the beginning of the year were more than fulfilled, as we shall see.

It was thought probable that at the end of the year Miss Keller would be able to pass the examinations set for admission to Harvard College, in English, History, French, and Elementary and Advanced German, making "seven hours," according to the schedule of the College. This, if accomplished, would constitute the "preliminary examination," and she would be permitted to complete the work at some other time. The usual method of admission to Harvard College requires the candidate to pass in sixteen hours, twelve being called "elementary" and four "advanced." At least five hours must be passed at a time to make any record. To prepare for the seven hours proposed would require pretty hard study, but I was willing that Helen should try it, because she seemed to be so nearly fitted that it would be useless to postpone the work and thus, perhaps, add to the burden of the following year. Besides, these examinations once off, the way would be plain for more leisurely work in the years that were to follow. While preparation for these tests was going on, Helen was to study arithmetic, in order to be able to begin algebra the next year. Mathematics is not her favorite study, and though she does good work in arithmetic, she does not excel there, as she does in language-subjects.

One of the questions that demanded attention at an early stage was, Who shall conduct the examinations? At Harvard, the candidates are numbered, and to those who determine the value of their work they are known by numbers only. It was, of course, impossible to conceal the fact that Helen's papers were written by her, because she was obliged to use a type-writer, and all other candidates would use pen or pencil. Some one would be obliged to serve as eyes for Miss Keller—some one who could testify that she was the person who actually produced the written paper. Miss Sullivan, naturally, felt unwilling to act in this capacity. Any one able to use the manual alphabet might read the papers to her, but it was evident that much more than that was necessary. It finally became plain to all that I was the proper person. As a member of the corporation of Radcliffe College, familiar with Harvard examinations for many years, I should be at home in all details. I was, as has been said, unable to use the manual alphabet. It seemed improbable that I could master it sufficiently to be able to put Helen in the position of a seeing candidate, but I determined to make the effort. I could be satisfied with no mere practice; I wanted to do actual work with Helen. I therefore undertook to give her a portion of her work in English—to read to her examination papers in French, German, etc., as might be necessary. At best it would be impossible for me, or, indeed, for any one, to release Helen from the handicap which embarrassed her, for all the other candidates were able to read and reread their papers, to read them in parts, and to read over all that they wrote as they progressed. It would not be practicable for Helen to have her examination in the room with the other candidates, because her type-writer would interrupt those around her. The whole embarrassment was overcome by a vote of the council, which placed me in charge of Helen's examination, gave me an allowance of time for my imperfect read-

ing, and permitted me to select a quiet room for the ordeal. At about Christmastide I began to read Shakespeare and other authors to Helen, she constantly complimenting me upon the good rate of my progress !

All difficulties in the general work vanished as we went on. The teacher of German became interested and learned to read to Helen with her hand. Others did the same. Though Miss Sullivan found herself fully occupied, as usual, she had helpers in reading the great amount that Helen needed in English, French, and German. We had, however, difficulty in getting books made promptly enough, in spite of the willingness of friends in London, in Philadelphia, and elsewhere to hasten all such work. The Perkins Institution lent us some books, but there were others that it was necessary to have put into Braille specially for our use. The avidity with which Helen read whatever was placed within her range kept her always ahead of the respective lessons. School girls sometimes study as though it were a "task," as indeed our fathers called it, but Helen never. With her a new text-book was a fresh and delightful field for investigation. Difficulties were merely new heights to be scaled. The exhilaration of overcoming obstacles kept this schoolgirl as much interested as another might be in achieving conquest in a game of golf or tennis.

The actual school work during the year showed little difference between the treatment of Helen and the other pupils. Miss Sullivan sat at Helen's side in the classes, interpreting to her with infinite patience the instruction of every teacher. In study-hours Miss Sullivan's labors were even more arduous, for she was obliged to read everything that Helen had to learn, excepting what was prepared in Braille ; she searched the lexicons and encyclopædias, and gave Helen the benefit of it all. When Helen went home Miss Sullivan went with her, and it was hers to satisfy the busy, unintermitting demands of the

intensely active brain, for, though others gladly helped, there were many matters which could be treated only by the one teacher who had awakened the activity and had followed its development from the first. Now it was a German grammar which had to be read, now a French story, and then some passage from Cæsar's Commentaries. It looked like drudgery, and drudgery it would certainly have been had not love shed its benign influence over all, lightening each step and turning hardship into pleasure.

Space will not permit me to dwell at large on the steps of progress. It was in reading and studying with Helen that my insight of her mind became the clearest. I read Shakespeare with her, and she showed the greatest pleasure in the light and amusing touches in "As You Like It," as well as in the serious passages of "King Henry V." We took up Burke's celebrated speech on Conciliation with the Colonies, and every point made an impression. The political bearing of the arguments, the justice or injustice of this or that, the history of the times, the characters of the actors, the meaning of the words and the peculiarities of style, all came under review, whether I wished it or not, by the force of Helen's interest.

Without a break, we took up Macaulay's Essay on Samuel Johnson, and the interest flagged. There was no such stimulus in the style as I had noticed in reading Burke. There was sympathy for the poor literary man, there was amusement at his strange life, there was rejoicing at every one of his successes, and there was appreciation for the fluent style of Macaulay; but everything was easy. There were few words to be explained, no difficulties to be overcome. I was sorry to see the lack of interest, and suddenly one day I stopped and instituted a comparison of the style of Burke and Macaulay. At once the former interest returned. There was now something to do which was worthy of doing. The mind was obliged

to exert itself, and so long as this was the case Helen was absorbed.

While reading Burke, I made a memorandum of certain words that Helen did not understand, and of others which she had no difficulty with. Here are some that she did not understand:

paper government	fertile	fomented	juridical
pruriency	ballast	excrescence	vouchers
inspector-general	minima	commodities	equinoctial
complection	predilection	chicane	inheres
criterion	bias	theorem	corollaries
coeval	dissidence	smattering	animadversion
mercurial	litigious	pounces	truck
operose	abrogated	concussion	inconvenient
radical	prosecute	comptroller	overt
indictment	pedantic	tantamount	exquisite
preposterous	heterogeneous	ill-husbandry	marches
tampering	paradoxically	sterling	clandestine
subversion.	consequential	"cord of a man"	chimerical
contingent	quantum	composition	

Here are some of the words that Helen had no difficulty with:

policy	mace	captivated	capital
impunity	shoots	aversion *from*	mediately
latitude	numerous	smartness	topped
lair	dragooning	inquisition	nice
magazines	civility	impositions	futility
competence	biennially	questioned	congruity
immunity	illation	acquiesces	

It is unnecessary to say that many of these words are used by Burke in senses quite different from those now in vogue.

When we encountered "heterogeneous," Helen said, "I have never seen that word, but it is evidently of Greek origin," though she had not studied Greek. When Burke said that Parliament had disarmed Wales by statute, and now proposed to disarm America by "an instruction," Helen quietly remarked, "Rather polite, was it not?" When I explained the meaning of "chicane," and showed her the particular trick of the New Englanders by which

they nullified an act of Parliament, Helen exclaimed at once, "That was the way in which the case was decided in 'The Merchant of Venice!' It was a legal quibble that Bellario taught Portia." This leads me to remark again, as I have done before, in print, I think, that the more I study the action of Helen's mind, the more emphatic becomes my conviction that its logical action is its most pronounced and peculiar trait. I took occasion to test her verbal memory in connection with the list of words that she had not understood. I went over them just before the June examinations to see how much of the explanations that had been given her she could recall. The study of Burke had extended from the close of February to the first of April. It was now about the first of June. Many of the words were still not comprehended fully, though they had been at the time of the reading in April and March. The explanation was repeated.

The Harvard examinations were held from the twenty-ninth of June to the third of July. As that time approached, I practised Helen on examination-papers of previous years in French, German, History, and Latin. Latin was not one of the subjects that we had intended to permit Helen to be examined in. She had not studied the subject one-half so long as normal pupils are accustomed to study it. I was surprised, as the close of the work of the year approached, to have the teacher of Latin tell me that Helen was as well fitted to take the admission examination in her subject as any of the candidates who had been through the usual course. I hesitated, fearful at first lest the warm feeling that I knew had grown up between Helen and her teachers might have led to a too partial estimate of the pupil's ability. However, it was shown to me that no doubt existed, and I gave my consent, thus adding two hours to the number that we had at first planned, making nine for these "preliminaries," and leaving but seven hours for the "finals," which were to come at some future year.

So much for the interesting process of preparing a young

girl blind and deaf for the entrance examinations of Harvard College. It only remains to summarize the result. Examinations are not a perfect test, but my experience of many years, during which hundreds of girls have passed under my personal view, has satisfied me that among the great number who are examined there are very few who are not, on the whole, properly weighed and classified. It is usually the nervous, anxious candidate who fails when she is prepared; and occasionally, on the other hand, a cool, collected girl will pass though she is not perfectly fitted. There was little anxiety about the result in the present instance. Helen was able to marshal her mental forces and to bring them to bear upon the subject before her much better than the average girl. It is, doubtless, a wonder that she could be fitted at all; but after we have overcome our surprise at that, we find no difficulty in believing that she is able to accomplish any mental feat that is possible to woman. The examination was to be a test, not only of the ability of Miss Keller, but also of the processes designed and carried out for years by Miss Sullivan.

It happened that Helen's most difficult examination was the first on the list. Advanced German came on Tuesday, June 29th, from nine to eleven o'clock. I had arranged to have a room where we could be free from all interruptions, and I had posted at the door a man who had orders not to admit any one except officers of Harvard or Radcliffe College. The papers were given out at nine o'clock at Harvard College, and were brought to me under seal. Helen sat at her type-writer, and I took a position at her side, so that my right hand could grasp hers. We had often done the same thing before, but no previous effort had been quite like this one, and we both were conscious of it. On other occasions we had tried to see if we could cope with the paper; now we were actually to write something to be submitted to Harvard examiners as a final test. It was plain to me that Helen felt

this. I read the entire paper through at first, and then I read it sentence by sentence. Helen repeated the words with her voice as my hands made the signs, because I was determined that she should not be prejudiced by any failure of mine to present to her mind the paper as it was printed, and, as I could not read the manual alphabet, there was no way to make sure of this except by having her repeat the words that I spelled.

The paper was not an easy one. It was evident that Helen felt that. Her brow was knit; her fingers seemed to want to clutch an idea; perspiration came; but with regularity the type-writer spelled out the English of the German text. Helen forged ahead, and I anxiously kept her supplied with new sentences to translate. By ten forty-one she had put into English all of the German from the German books that she had read. Then she took up the English to be translated into German. At eleven five this, too, had been done. Next there was a passage from a book that Helen had never seen. This was completed at eleven forty-four. I then read to Helen what she had written, so far as the time permitted, and she dictated such changes as she thought necessary. These I interlined. It then went to the examiners, with a certificate from me that it was the sole and unaided work of candidate number 233.

There was no ordeal on Wednesday, but at nine on Thursday the examination in Latin began. I read the paper just as I had read that in German. It was not easy, but it was plain that it did not present the difficulties that the German paper had, and Helen was very cool. She was confident. The work went steadily forward, and was duly completed and sent to the College as before. On Friday, July 2, at a little before noon, we began the one-hour paper on the history of Greece and Rome, and it was followed, with a slight intermission, by the two-hour paper on English. These were uneventful. They were play for Helen, though naturally there were matters in

the history paper of which she had never heard. She could have written indefinitely on both of these papers. We had spent weeks in the critical study of Burke's speech, but not a question was based on it. We had thought that DeFoe's journal of the plague was too horrible to trouble Helen with, and but a few pages had been read to her. She found some questions on it, however, and she was able to write satisfactorily on the subject.

On Saturday there was one hour for Elementary French, and one for Elementary German. Both of these were easy, though the German is more to Helen's taste than the French. While we were going through this German paper, there was a ring at the door, and Professor Schilling was announced. He had come to let me know that Helen had been successful in her advanced German, the paper being pronounced excellent. It was very kind of the Professor to let me know this, for it gave Helen her first encouragement, and she went off for her summer vacation in an hour with a lighter heart, though I believe she had no doubts at any time.

Since then I have heard from all of the examinations. She was successful in every subject and took "honors" in English and German. I think that I may say that no candidate in Harvard or Radcliffe College was graded higher than Helen in English. The result is remarkable, especially when we consider that Helen has been studying on strictly college preparatory lines for one year only She had had long and careful instruction, it is true, and she had had always the loving ministrations of Miss Sullivan, in addition to the inestimable advantage of a concentration that the rest of us never know. No man or woman has ever in my experience got ready for these examinations in so brief a time. How has it been accomplished? By a union of patience, determination, and affection, with the foundation of an uncommon brain.

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